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Economic and political problems have exacerbated longstanding ideological rifts within the ruling party, causing President Alfonsin to temper government policy in an effort to maintain a balance between competing factions and thereby preserve party unity. 3.5(c)

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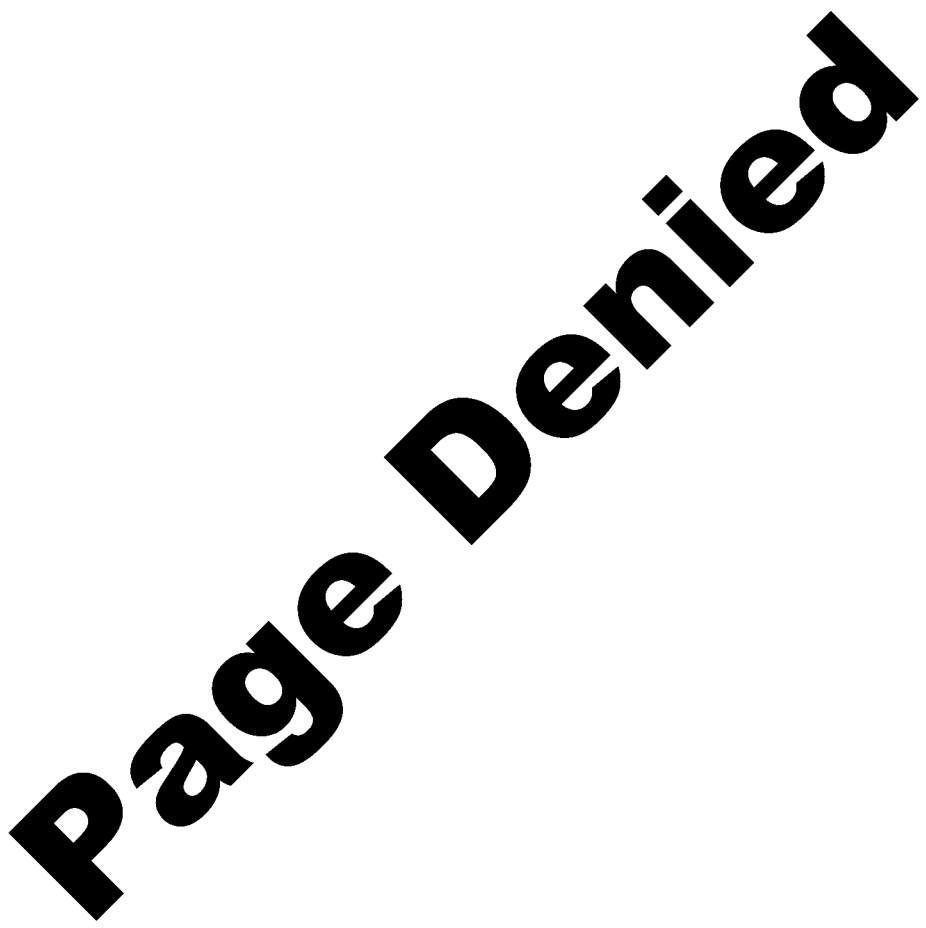

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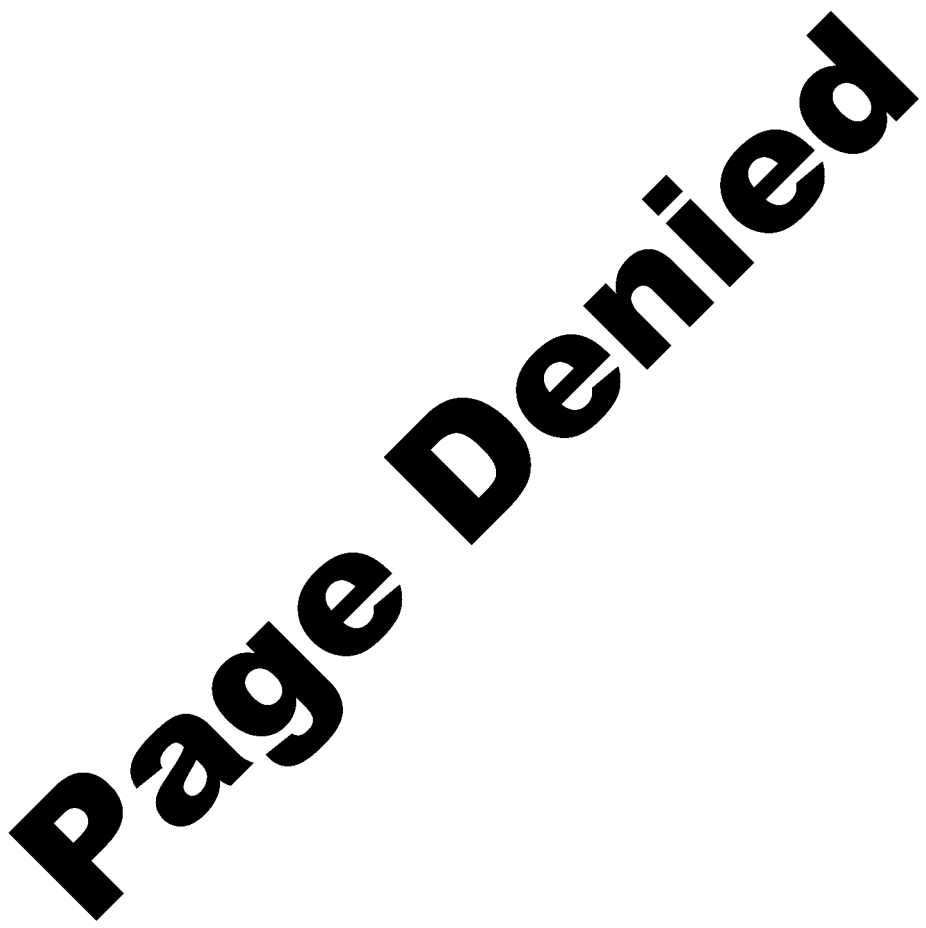

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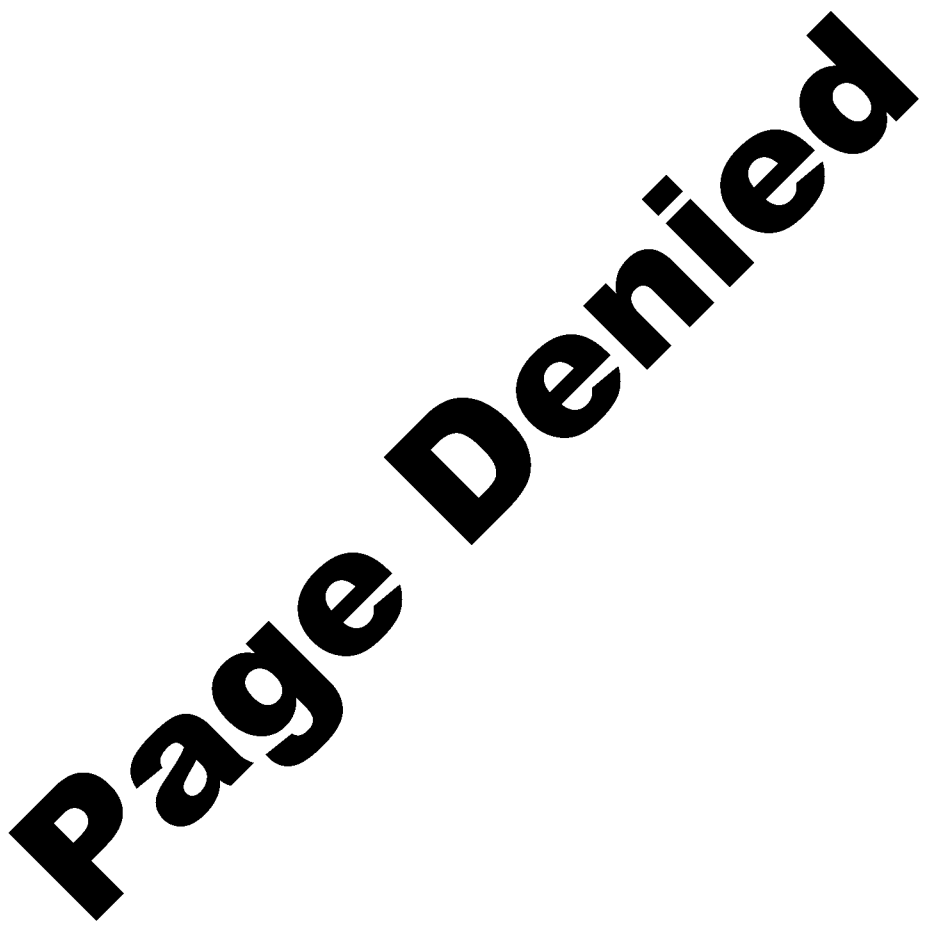

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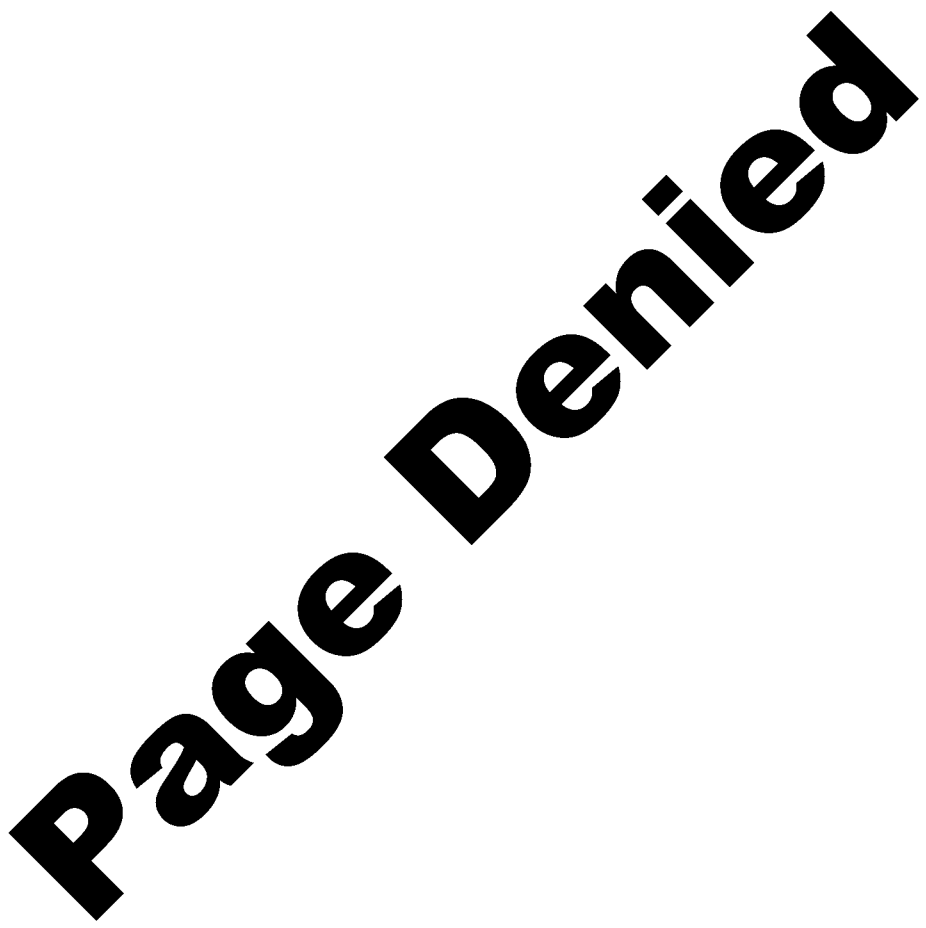

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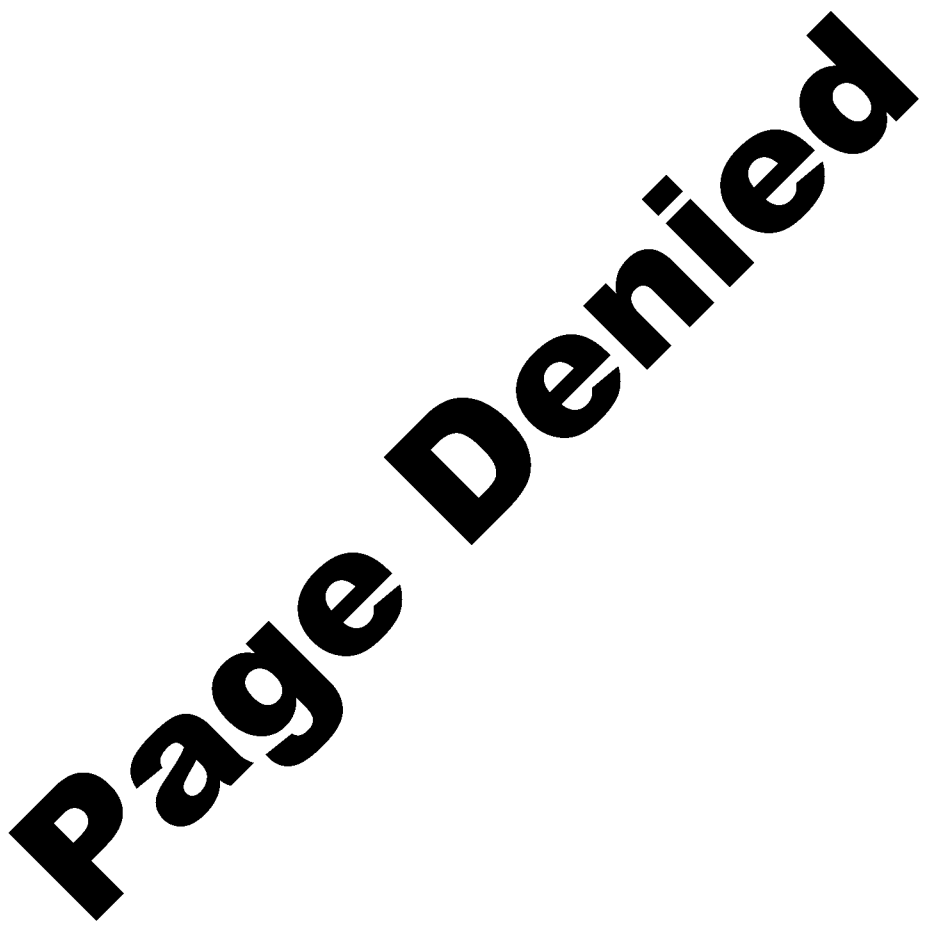

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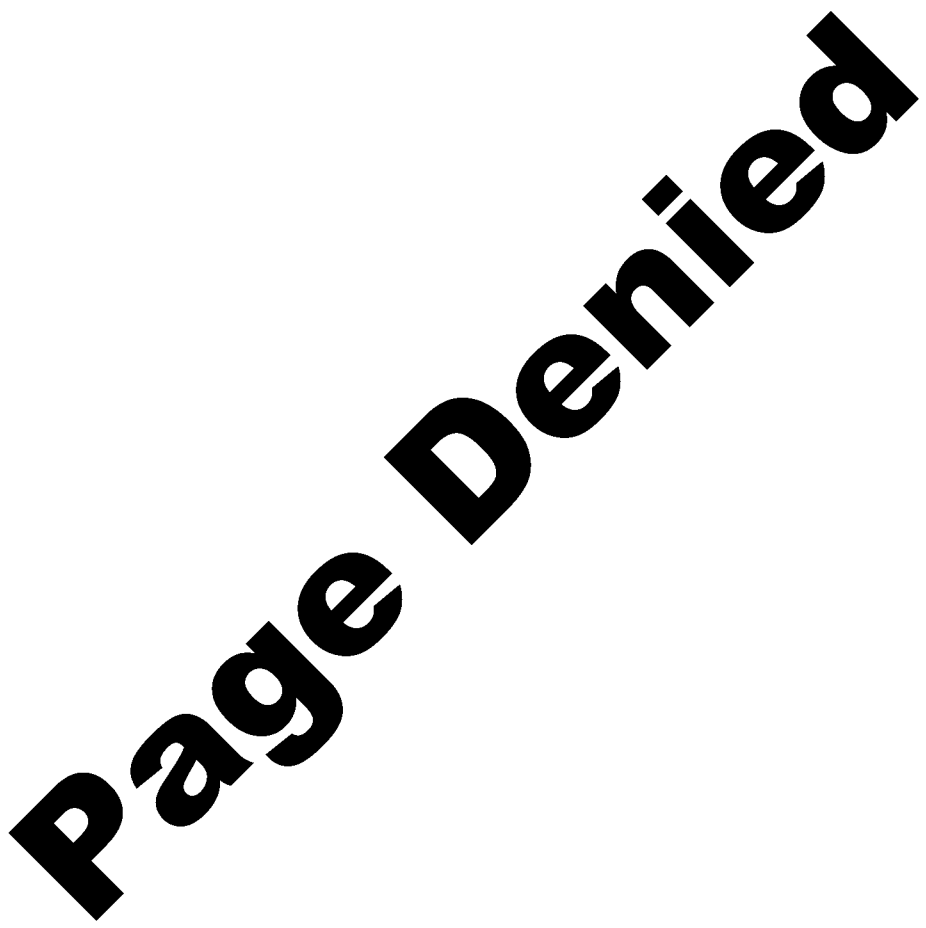

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Argentina: Radical Party Politics 3.5(c)

Economic and political problems have exacerbated longstanding ideological rifts within President Alfonsin's ruling Radical Civic Union Party. These differences have affected government policy on a range of issues as Alfonsin has tried to maintain a balance between competing factions to preserve party unity. Recently, however, the President seems to be moderating his aggressive policy positions in an effort to improve relations with Argentina's traditional power brokers—the military and Peronists. Although the Radicals' internal difficulties are manageable, several factors could deepen splits, erode Alfonsin's ability to govern, and encourage the opposition.

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Alfonsin and his left-of-center Renovation and Change faction gained control of the Radical Party in mid-1983 after a 10-year struggle with the more moderate National Line faction, which had dominated the party since the 1940s. Alfonsin formed his group in the early 1970s to move the party toward more progressive stances that could broaden its appeal beyond its traditional middle-class following.

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After securing the presidential nomination, Alfonsin set out to expand the party's historic 25-percent share of the electorate. He pledged to reactivate the economy, curb the power of the military and the Peronist-dominated trade union movement, defend human rights, and foster open government. Alfonsin won 52 percent of the votes cast last October and took office in December with plans to use his mandate to implement his programs swiftly. 3.5(c)

Cracks in the Facade

The magnitude of Alfonsin's victory at first obscured the existence of factionalism within the Radical Party, but the problem has grown since the President took office and is manifested in disputes on a range of critical issues. According to press and other reporting, there was considerable internal party debate on economic policy as inflation far outstripped official projections after a slight dip in January. Human rights advocates in the party were miffed by the President's decision to prosecute only former regime leaders instead of all military officers accused of excesses. Peronist successes in blocking the labor reform bill in late March and in provoking sporadic labor unrest exacerbated the Radicals' squabbling.

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In general, the party left has pushed for a tough line in dealing with the Peronists, the military, and the IMF and commercial lenders. Moreover, according to US Embassy reporting leftists have pressed for a more Third World–

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Radical Party Factions

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even before Alfonsin's election, leftists within his Renovation and Change faction formed the "Coordinating Group." Moderate leftists formed the rival Popular Intransigence faction headed by a key Radical legislator, Ruben Rabanal. More politically conservative Radicals had no formal organization, but they gravitated around Julio Saguier, mayor of Buenos Aires and a close Alfonsin confidant. In 3.3(b)(1)

April, this group allied with Popular Intransigence to form the Intransigent Renovation, a label underscoring their adherence to Alfonsin's programs—and aimed at containing the party's left wing. Smaller factions include the moderate "Cordoba Clique," centered in Argentina's second-largest city, from which Alfonsin selected his Vice President, Victor Martinez. The party also has a small group of hardline nationalists, including regional bank president and well-known economist Aldo Ferrer and legislator Luis Leon.

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oriented foreign policy. the left has pressed for expanded ties with Cuba and Nicaragua and support for opposition groups in neighboring countries. Party moderates generally agree with these policy objectives but, according to US Embassy reporting, are more willing to compromise with Argentina's traditional power brokers and are more realistic in dealing with foreign lenders. They are also more moderate on foreign policy issues. For their part, Radical hardline nationalists have focused primarily on debt negotiations and the Beagle Channel and Falklands disputes—in which they oppose any accommodation. 3.5(c)

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Alfonsin's Response

The President's initial vacillation in response to the factional pressures conveyed the impression—especially to the military—that he was indecisive. the armed forces saw him as susceptible to leftist pressures and unable to put together coherent policies. Until about mid-March, according to US Embassy and press reporting, Alfonsin allowed party leftists to hold sway in the administration. they were:

- Behind the early aggressive moves against the military. 3.3(b)(1)
- Behind the decision to push the labor reform bill through Congress without consulting the Peronists or other legislative blocs, thereby antagonizing potential supporters and assuring the bill's defeat in the Senate.
- Among the strongest advocates of a tougher stand against the US bankers' insistence on a March deadline for the payment of interest arrearages on the external debt. 3.5(c)

In the wake of key legislative defeats and continuing economic setbacks and in anticipation of budget debates and debt negotiations, however, Alfonsin has moved gradually toward party moderates. the President believed the continued support of the left wing was important, but he planned to take steps to limit its influence in Congress, in his Cabinet, and among his close advisers. Alfonsin is also trying to distance himself from the left by dealing with them through intermediaries. 3.5(c)

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The President has made some staffing changes that reflect his more moderate orientation. The most visible was the replacement of his combative labor minister in April with a moderate who has close ties to both major party factions and is acceptable to the Peronists. Moreover, one Argentine political observer has pointed out that Alfonsin has allowed other moderates among his close advisers to assume a larger role in policymaking. Even before the shift in the labor portfolio, for example, Alfonsin had appointed a moderate union leader as his personal representative to smooth over differences with the Peronists. In economic policy, Raul Prebisch has emerged as a voice of moderation to counter the often shrill criticism of foreign lenders by party and administration spokesmen. Moderate Angel Robledo, one of the few prominent Peronists to serve in the administration, is an adviser on military affairs. 3.5(c)

Further, according to press reports, Alfonsin has resisted pressures to call a party convention to elect a new leadership. Like other Radicals elected to office, he is bound by tradition to relinquish his post as party leader to avoid conflicts of interest and provide the party with full-time leadership. We agree with some political observers who believe that Alfonsin wants to retain control at least until the congressional election in 1985 to help keep the lid on potential divisiveness. 3.5(c)

Outlook for the Party

Although the splits apparently are still manageable, they will almost certainly be aggravated by inept presidential performance, further economic setbacks, or Peronist successes. This disunity will complicate policymaking and diminish Alfonsin's ability to hold his electoral coalition intact. Moreover, persistent rifts could dash the Radicals' hopes of capturing control of the Senate in the congressional elections. 3.5(c)

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In his efforts to maintain party unity, the President faces his greatest challenge from party leftists. Failure to curb them would almost certainly seriously hamper efforts to placate the military and reach an accommodation with opposition labor and political leaders. It would also tend to substitute opposition charges that Alfonsin is an ineffective leader, unable to keep even his own house in order, let alone deal with Argentina's economic and political problems.

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